

Update on Portland Harbor Superfund Site

Kim Cox, DEQ and Judy R. Smith, EPA

Portland Harbor was declared a Superfund site by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in December 2000. Sediments in this highly developed industrial stretch of the Willamette River are contaminated with metals, pesticides, PCB's, petroleum products and other hazardous substances that pose potential threats to people and the environment. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) are working together to determine how the Superfund cleanup should proceed.

Several other state and federal agencies and six tribal governments are adding their expertise and resources to the effort, and are part of the project team. The team includes U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration,, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, and the Grand Ronde, Warm Springs, Siletz, Yakama, Umatilla, and Nez Perce Tribes. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was recently developed which defines the roles and responsibilities of EPA and DEQ, and describes how the team will coordinate.

The MOU establishes:

- DEQ as the lead agency at upland sites, using State cleanup law authorities to continue cleanup work along the banks of the river;
- EPA as the lead agency for the in-water (sediment) investigations, using its authorities under the federal Superfund law;
- A Technical Coordination Team and a Legal Coordination Team that will identify and resolve issues during development, implementation and coordination of the in-water sediment investigation and uplands cleanup work;
- How Tribal Cultural Resource issues will be addressed;
- That EPA will provide comment on key source control decisions proposed by DEQ; and
- A dispute resolution process that is available to all of the parties who have signed the MOU.

The full text of the MOU is available on the EPA and DEQ web sites. www.epa.gov/R10/earth (use the index button and go to P for Portland Harbor), and www.deq.state.or.us (click on "site index", then go to P for Portland Harbor).

One of the first actions taken by EPA for the Portland Harbor Superfund process was identifying potentially responsible parties (PRP's) who may be responsible for some of the cleanup. In December 2000, EPA sent letters to an initial list of 69 PRP's, providing notice of potential liability in the Portland Harbor cleanup. A group of about 20 of these PRP's came forward and EPA is currently in the process of negotiating the details of the upcoming Remedial Investigation and Feasibility Study (RI/FS). The purpose of the RI/FS is to determine the extent and nature of the contamination.

DEQ continues work at 44 upland cleanup sites along the banks of the Harbor. The work ranges from the very early stages of investigation to cleanup activities. DEQ will be working with EPA, and the rest of the project team, on determining which cleanup sites are potential sources of sediment contamination, and how the upland work is coordinated with the in-water work.

Responsible parties are funding all work except at three upland sites. A complete list of sites, and a description of site activity is located on DEQ's webpage.

To help explain technical information to the public, EPA is awarding a Technical Assistance Grant to Willamette Riverkeeper, a local public interest group who submitted an application when the grant availability was advertised last December. The grant is intended to help the local community understand and participate in the investigation and cleanup process.

At the present time, EPA and DEQ are drafting a combined plan for community and public involvement. For information, to share ideas, or to get on the mailing list, you are encouraged to contact Portland Harbor Community Involvement Coordinators:

For EPA: Judy R. Smith 206-553-6246 or Smith.JudyR@EPA.gov,

For DEQ: Kim Cox at 503-229-6590 or Cox.Kim@deq.state.or.us